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Page 2



## 5,000 Gypsies move in on village of 414



Residents' fury as travellers arrive for religious event

By Martin Green  
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FIVE thousand Gypsies descended on a field in the tiny village of Woodham Ferrers this week.

The picturesque village - which has a population of just 414 - is the venue for the Gypsy church's 2011 Light and Life Festival, a convention that has attracted travellers from Basildon to Bordeaux.

Organisers at the Pentecostal

Christian group, which is made up of Romany and Irish travellers, promised to leave by tomorrow and clear up after themselves.

But villagers are furious about the invasion, with one dubbing the farmer who allowed them to hold the festival "the most hated man in the village".

Margaret Wicking, who has lived in Woodham Ferrers for 48 years, said: "It's upset me terribly. My house backs on to the field and they are using my garden for a

toilet. My garden is full of toilet paper and it stinks. I shouted, 'Stop,' but I got a mouthful of abuse and a rock through my roof."

"My son has had to take time off work to come and stay with me because I am so scared."

Katie Jarrett, 24, of nearby South Woodham Ferrers, said: "It's been an absolute nightmare. Pubs have closed because of the trouble. Asda is supposed to be 24-hour but that shut because the gypsies ransacked the place, and

the beauty salons have closed."

But Andrew Richardson, of the 120-acre Birkett Hall Livery Stables and Farm, defended his decision to allow the festival to come to Essex.

"This isn't just a commercial venture. Gypsies are Europe's last persecuted minority," said Andrew, 58, whose father Peter owns the land but is currently on a cruise.

"We are doing our bit to help

■ Turn to page 6

100mph train hits man on scooter

A MAN cheated death when his mobility scooter was struck by a 100mph commuter train at a level crossing.

Tony Winskill, 43, escaped with just minor injuries after apparently evading the barriers at the level crossing in Kelvedon on Monday.

According to the emergency services Mr Winskill was drunk when his blue mobility scooter dodged the closing barriers and was clipped by a high-speed passenger train on the Church Street crossing.



DAMAGED: The scooter at Kelvedon level crossing

He was catapulted back into the road by the train, suffering only minor cuts and bruises.

British Transport Police Inspector Steve Brooks said that Mr Winskill was "incredibly lucky to be alive".

Network Rail said that the crossing was working correctly.

The alarm was raised when the driver of the 10.18 from Liverpool Street to Clacton radioed his control unit to tell them he had hit a man in a wheelchair on the crossing.

Mr Winskill is in Broomfield hospital for observation and remains in a stable and comfortable condition.

■ Call for scooter tests - pages 12&13

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